

K-611

Circa 1900

Dickerson Ark at Kent Museum

Near Kennedyville

Private

The Dickerson ark was recently moved to the Kent Museum at Turner's Creek from the Cliffs area of the Chester River after it was donated by Robert M. Hewes, III, on whose property it had been for some years previously and who had it restored. Made entirely of wood, the ark has a cabin with gable roof above a heavily-made, simple scow bottom. The walls of the cabin are weatherboarded. There is a low board-and-batten door at the platform end and one small window on each long side. The interior is undivided and simply furnished. The ark was built circa 1900 by John Dickerson and used until 1935 by his family and others. The Dickerson Ark is the best preserved (and restored) of very few Kent County arks (or shanty scows or houseboats) that survive from the period when they were part of watermen's work and way of life. Part boat and part dwelling, they are a hybrid utilitarian structure that was well adapted to the needs of the watermen of the time. Arks were not sophisticated structures that required building by a boatbuilder or even a skilled carpenter; most users could and did make their own. They were once part of winter and spring fishing for Kent County watermen, when they were towed to the fishing or oystering grounds, first by log canoes under sail and then by motorized boats, and pulled up on the shore to serve as dwellings for the season, although most watermen made weekly or fortnightly visits home. Made obsolete by improved, more powerful boat motors and larger boats during the 1930s, the old arks were left to rot in marshes, dismantled for re-use of their materials, and used for backyard sheds and meathouses. Some were used as year-round dwellings. The Dickerson ark is one of five known to still exist in Kent County, though one of these is in ruins and one has been converted to a house. A large, somewhat altered ark is in Betterton (K-609), and one is in Chestertown (K-610). One ark from the Rock Hall area that saw service as a meat house after retirement from the water is at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michaels. The Dickerson ark is an example of the smallest sort built and one of the few that were built with a gable roof.

Maryland Historical Trust

State Historic Sites Inventory Form

1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic

and/or common Dickerson Ark at Kent Museum

2. Location

East side Rt. 448, (Turner's Creek Rd.), 3.5 miles
 street & number north of Kennedyville ☐ not for publication

city, town Kennedyville ☒ vicinity of congressional district.

state Maryland county Kent

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Kent Museum, Inc. c/o J. Horton Silcox, Jr.

street & number P.O. Box 57 telephone no.: 348-5421

city, town Chestertown state and zip code Maryland 21620

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Kent County Courthouse liber EHP 61

street & number folio 670

city, town Chestertown state Maryland

6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys NONE

title

date ☐ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records

city, town state

8. Significance

Survey No. K-611

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Fishing

Specific dates Circa 1900 **Builder/Architect** John Dickerson

check: Applicable Criteria: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D
and/or

Applicable Exception: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Level of Significance: ☐ national ☐ state ☐ local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

The Dickerson Ark is the best preserved (and restored) of very few Kent County arks (or shanty scows or houseboats) that survive from the period when they were part of watermen's work and way of life. Part boat and part dwelling, they are a hybrid utilitarian structure that was well adapted to the needs of the watermen of the time. Arks were not sophisticated structures that required building by a boatbuilder or even a skilled carpenter; most users could and did make their own. They were once part of winter and spring fishing for Kent County watermen, when they were towed to the fishing grounds, first by log canoes under sail and then by motorized boats, and pulled up on the shore to serve as dwellings for the season, although most watermen made weekly or fortnightly visits home. Made obsolete by improved, more powerful boat motors and larger boats during the 1930s, the old arks were left to rot in marshes, dismantled for re-use of their materials, and used for backyard sheds and meathouses. The Dickerson ark is one of five known to still exist in Kent County, though one of these is in ruins and one has been converted to a house. A large, somewhat altered ark is in Betterton (K-609), and one is in Chestertown (K-610). One ark from the Rock Hall area that saw service as a meat house after retirement from the water is at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michaels. The Dickerson ark is an example of the smallest sort built and one of the few that were built with a gable roof.

(continued)

The Dickerson ark is resting blocked up in a field at the Kent Museum property on the southeast side of the road to Turner's Creek. The lower portion is a straight-sided scow-type hull about 6 feet wide and 12 feet long. The hull sides, measured in the middle, are about 19" high. The cabin is shorter than the scow bottom, leaving room for a small platform two feet deep at the entry end. Cabin height along the eaves, from the top edge of the hull, is about 51 inches; it is about 8 inches higher at the ridge.

The roof is a shallow gable, now covered with asphalt roll roofing on plywood decking, with the edges turned at the edge (where it has deteriorated). There is a small (c. 2-1/2") fascia; overhang is about 3-1/2" on the sides and about 5" on the ends. The cornice is open, exposing the rafters. The sides are covered with horizontal, lapped weatherboard in the manner of a house with single cornerboards.

A short entry door of boards and battens is at the gable end with the platform. There is also now a screen door. One steps down onto the loose floorboards laid across the keelson and the supports at the hull edge. There are short bunkbeds across the end opposite the entry and two drop-leaf tables, one attached to each side of the ark beneath a window. Embedded in the top of one table is a Lincoln penny with a date of 1917, which is probably not the date of construction, however. The ark is known to have been in the Dickerson family before that time. There is a pair of simple benches for seating. In the entry gable end there is a stovepipe protruding through the wall and angled upward. Inside that corner was for a boat stove, with wood used for cooking and coal for heat. There are simple box-shelves on the wall for holding provisions. There is also space for storage under the platform, open on the interior.

At the rear end of the hull on the exterior there is a shaped U bracket of wood for towing, though whether this type of bracket is authentic is not known. The scow bottom itself is made of 5/4" board in wide widths, laid crosswise. During a stay on shore the hull was either kept with water in it or it was put into the water for a day or two before being towed home so that it would not leak too badly. However, these scows were not considered particularly watertight and often had to be bailed en route, often the job of a young boy. Kent County boats generally were not made with caulking, and these arks were no exception.

There is a small window centered in the upper part of each side wall of the cabin. The sash is awning type, with two lights. The windows lifted up into the interior of the cabin and were fastened to a rafter.

The rafters are light, about 3" in height and made of 5/4" board, the standard Kent County boatbuilding material. They are about 28-1/2" to 31-1/2" inches on center. There is no ridge. They are tied at the ridge by small wood scraps nailed at the peak to each rafter pair. At the eaves the rafters are partially cut flat to rest on the wall plate, with a portion of the upper rafter extending beyond the plate. The rafters are nailed to the plate. There are similarly light wall studs to which the weatherboard is nailed. The walls of this ark are not finished on the interior, though some arks were.

The Dickerson ark was built circa 1900 by John Dickerson, a waterman who lived and worked from the Cliffs-Comegys Bight area of Quaker Neck on the Chester River. He and his two sons, Philemon and Benjamin, towed it behind their log canoe (first by sale and converted to motorized use) to Durdin's Creek at East Neck Island for the oyster season, for Cliffs area watermen lived too far from the oyster beds to travel to them daily as did watermen in the Rock Hall area. They stayed in it for the season, coming home between times for visits, and then towed it home about Christmas time.

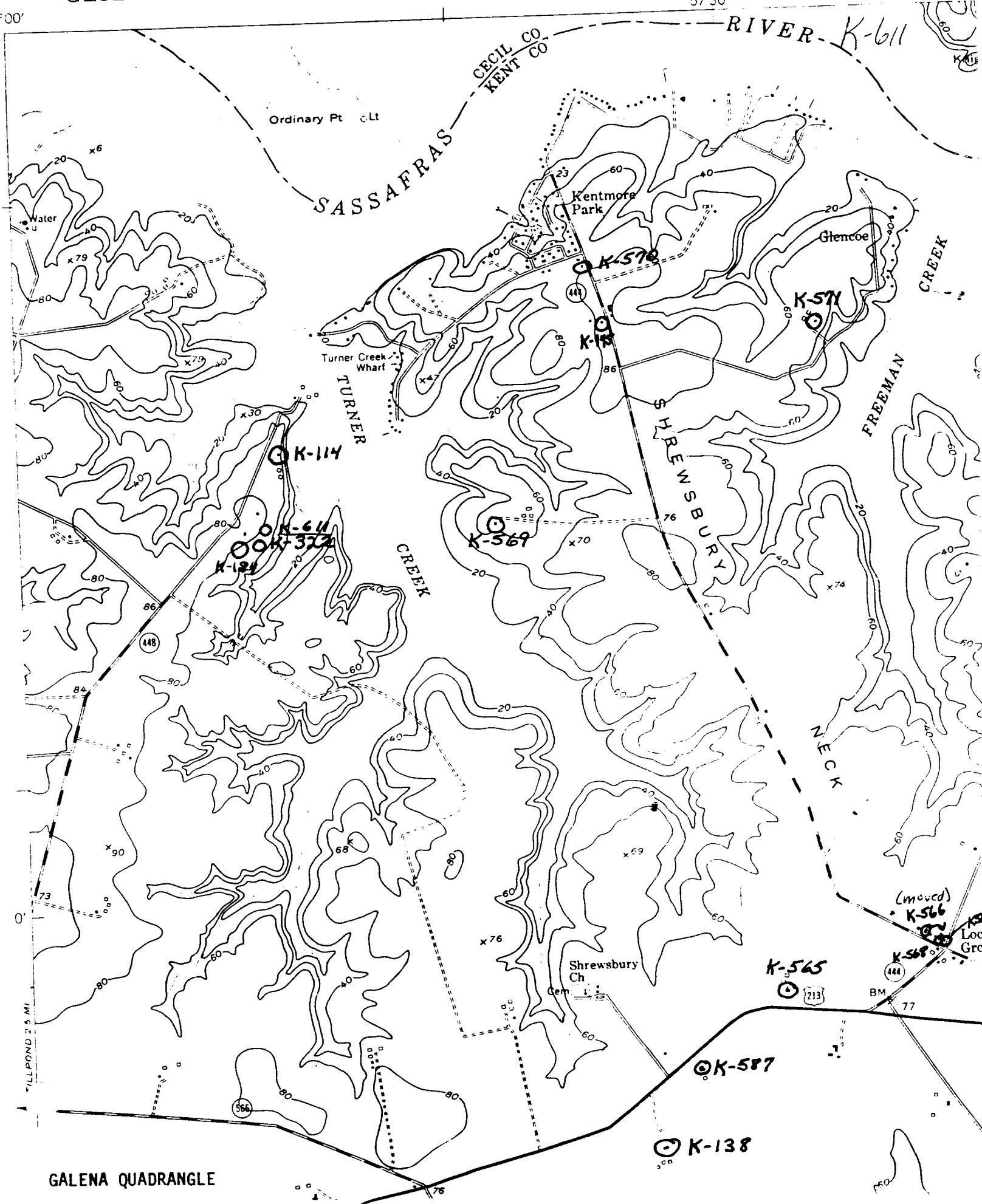
The ark was used until a severe flood supposed to have occurred in 1935 (this actually might be a 1933 hurricane). Many of the boats docked there were torn loose and broken up. This ark had been anchored between Cliffs and Comegys Bight near a farm shore; it came to rest in a marsh, where it remained for many years before it was finally blocked up. The surviving son of the family, Philemon, gave the old ark circa 1967 to Robert M. Hewes, III, who was interested in restoring it to its original condition. Dickerson himself did much of the work.

Other Kent County watermen took their arks to different locations, sometimes clustering them in "ark villages." One popular location was Love Point, at the Langenfelder farm there, for winter fishing, especially for rockfish. In the Maryland Department of the Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore there are some old, faded photographs taken by C. C. Hopper, who worked for a Chestertown newspaper, of such a Love Point ark village, probably inhabited by Rock Hall watermen. The photographs were last known to be filed in a photo folder under the category of "oysters." If they are not rescued soon, the images will be gone.

Another popular location for Kent County watermen was at two more northerly locations, for spring fishing, especially for shad. A small village of five to nine arks could be found each year at Harris' Wharf near the Sassafras River mouth and at the mouth of Still Pond Creek. The latter location is documented by an old Baltimore Sun Magazine photo.

Arks were used by some through the 1920s and into the 1930s by some watermen, but they were replaced when boats with more powerful motors became available so that the men could return home after a day's work. Also, larger boats, becoming longer and wider each year and with sizable cabins were also built to be lived in as horsepower increased.

After they were retired, some arks served as primary dwellings, mostly for aged, retired watermen who were either bachelors or whose wives had died. Usually several were located near each other fairly close to the water although one remains, now in ruins, on Chesapeake Avenue in Rock Hall, whose occupant remained there until he died. The grandfather of writer Gilbert Byron lived in an ark (which he may have rented) in Chestertown near the old railroad wharf at the south end of Water Street. One ark that was lived in year round remains in that area, the Mench ark, K-610. It is large, more sophisticatedly built, and a "two roomer."





K-611

Dickerson Ark at Kent Museum

Turner's Creek Rd., near Kennedyville

M. Q. Fallaw - 11/15/85

View to northeast

12611-24



K-611

Dickerson Ark at Kent Museum

Turner's Creek Rd., near Kennedyville

M. Q. Fallaw - 11/15/85

View to southwest

12611224